

I 7

[5] /1/ Let us return to the good we are looking for and [1097^a15] what it could possibly be. For it is apparently different in different actions and different crafts, since it is one thing in medicine, a different one in generalship, and likewise for the rest. What, then, is the good characteristic of each? Or isn't it the thing for whose sake the rest of the actions are done? In medicine this is health, in generalship victory, in building a house, and in other crafts something else, and in [1097^a20] every action and deliberate choice it is the end, since it is for the sake of the end that everyone does the rest of the actions. So if there is some end of all the things doable in action, this will be the good doable in action, and, if there are more than one, it will be these.

/2/ Taking a different course, then, our account has reached the same conclusion.¹ But we should try to make this yet more illuminating.

/3/ Since there are evidently many [1097^a25] ends, and we choose some of them because of something else, as we do wealth, flutes, and instruments generally, it is clear that not all ends are complete. But the best one is apparently something complete.² So if one thing alone is complete, this will be what we are looking for, but if there are more, it will be the most complete of them.

¹ **The same conclusion:** As at 1095^a16-17 or 1094^b6-7.

² **Complete** (*teleios*): The adjective *teleios*, which derives from *telos* ("end," "goal"), has a number of different senses. "[a] We call [*part-whole*] complete that outside of which not even one part is to be found, as, for example, the complete time of each thing is the one outside of which there is no time to be found that is part of that time, and [b] we also call [*value*] complete that which, as regards virtue or goodness, cannot be surpassed relative to its kind, as, for example, a doctor is complete and a flute-player is complete when they lack nothing as regards the form of their own proper virtue... Further, virtue is a sort of completion, since each thing is complete and every substance is complete when, as regards the form of its proper virtue, it lacks no part of its natural extent. [c] Again, things that have attained a good end are called [*end*] complete, since things are complete as regards having attained their end ... which is a last thing. ... And the last thing for which something is done is also an end" (*Met.* V 16 1021^b12-30).

/4/ We say that |1097^a30| what is intrinsically worth pursuing is more complete than what is worth pursuing because of something else, that what is never choiceworthy because of something else is more complete than things that are both intrinsically choiceworthy and choiceworthy because of it, and that what is unconditionally complete, then, is what is always intrinsically choiceworthy and never choiceworthy because of something else.

/5/ Happiness seems to be most like this, since *it* we always choose because of itself and never because of something else. |1097^b1| Honor, pleasure, understanding, and all virtue, on the other hand, though we do choose because of themselves as well (since if they had no further consequences, we would still take each of them), we also choose for the sake of happiness, supposing that because of them we shall be happy. Happiness, on the other hand, |1097^b5| no one chooses for the sake of these things or because of anything else in general.

/6/ The same conclusion also apparently follows from self-sufficiency, since the complete good seems to be self-sufficient. By “*self-sufficient*,” however, we do not mean self-sufficient for someone who is alone, living a solitary life, but also for parents, children, wife, and friends and fellow citizens generally,³ |1097^b10| since a

³ By “**self-sufficient**,” ... **citizens generally**: *To d'autarkes legomen [1] ouk autô[i] monô[i], tô[i] zônti bion monôtên, all kai [2] goneusi kai teknois kai gunaiki kai holôs tois philois kai politais* (“By ‘self-sufficient’ ... citizens generally”). The grammar is loose. The logical subject is *autô[i]* (“someone”). He is considered as (1) living alone and as (2) living a political life in relationship with others. The relevant sort of self-sufficiency applies to happiness for him not in (1) but in (2). The sentence, however, applies “self-sufficiency” in (2) not to happiness for him but for parents, children, and so on. Since their happiness does have an impact on his own happiness (see I 8 1099^b3-6), this may be what Aristotle intends. When he returns to the topic of happiness, however, he claims that the “self-sufficiency we spoke of” (presumably here), is found more in contemplation than anything else in part because a person can contemplate by himself without (or with minimum need for) other people (X 7 1177^a27-^b1). At the same time, he recognizes that our nature “is not self-sufficient for contemplation,” so that we need other things in our lives in order to be able to engage in it, even though it itself in an entirely self-sufficient end (X 8 1178^b33-35). It

human being is by nature⁴ political.⁵ /7/ Of these, some defining mark⁶ must be found, since, if we extend the list to ancestors and descendants, and friends' friends, it will go on without limit. But we must investigate this on another occasion. In any case, we suppose that what is self-sufficient is what, on its own, makes a life choiceworthy and lacking in nothing, and this, |1097^b15| we think, is what happiness is like.

/8/ Further, we think it is the most choiceworthy of all things, when not counted among them—for if it is counted among them, it clearly would be more choiceworthy with the addition of the least of goods. For what is added would bring about a superabundance of goods,⁷ and, of goods, the greater one is always more choiceworthy.

seems, then, that we should understand (1-2) as making a cognate point. Family, friends, and fellow citizens are among the external goods (IX 9 1169^b10) or added prosperity (I 8 1099^b6-7) that a person must be provided with first. When he already has these, we can then raise the question of self-sufficiency, by asking about what activity, taken in isolation, would make his life choiceworthy and lacking in nothing (1097^b14-15).

⁴ **Nature** (*phusis*): A nature is an internal source of “movement and rest, whether with respect to place, growth and decay, or alteration” (*Ph.* II 1 192^b13-15).

⁵ **Political** (*politikos*): Often the claim is that a human being is by nature a political animal (*NE* IX 9 1169^b18-19), where political animals are those whose function “is some one common thing” (*HA* I 1 488^a7-8). In this sense gregarious animals, such as bees, wasps, ants, and cranes also count as political. A human being is more fully political than any of these, however, because he has the capacity for articulate speech, whose purpose is “to make clear what is beneficial or harmful, and hence also what is just or unjust. For it is special to human beings, in comparison to other animals, that they alone have perception of what is good or bad, just or unjust, and the rest. And it is community in these that makes a household and a city” (*Pol.* I 2 1253^a2-18). Human beings are political animals, then, because they are naturally *polis*- or city-dwellers (*NE* VIII 12 1162^a17-19, *Pol.* III 6 1278^b15-30).

⁶ **Defining mark** (*horos*): In *NE*, the most common meaning of *horos* is “term,” in the logical sense, in which a syllogism has three terms. But here, as often elsewhere, a *horos* is what gives definition to what would otherwise lack it (see *Pol.* I 9 1258^a18, II 8 1267^a29, VII 4 1326^a35).

⁷ **What is added would bring about a superabundance of goods:** *MM* I 3 1184^a15-21: “How should we look for the best good? Is it to be counted among good things? Surely, that would be absurd. For the best is the complete end, and the complete end, unconditionally speaking, seems to be nothing other than happiness, and happiness is constituted out of many goods. So if in looking for the best one, you count it among the goods, it will be better than

Happiness, then, is apparently something complete and self-sufficient,
 [1097^b20] since it is the end of what is doable in action.

[6] /9/ But to say that *happiness* is the best good is perhaps to say something that is apparently quite generally conceded, and we still need a plainer statement of what it is. /10/ Maybe, then, this would come about if the function⁸ of a human being were grasped. For just as for a flute-player, a sculptor, [1097^b25] every craftsman, and, in general, whatever has some function and action, the good—the doing *well*—seems to lie in the function, the same seems to hold of a human being, if indeed there is some function that is his.

itself, because it itself is the best one. For example, take healthy things and health, and look to see which is the best of all these. But the best one is health. So if this is the best one, it will be better than itself, which is a strange outcome.” *Rh.* I 7 1363^b18-21: “A larger number of goods is a greater good than one or than a smaller number of them, provided that the one or the smaller number is included in the count, since the larger number exceeds the smaller, and what is contained in the larger number is exceeded by it.”

⁸ **Function** (*ergon*): A function is the activity that is the use or actualization of a state, capacity, or disposition, or a work or product that is the further result of such an activity. Aristotle attributes functions to an enormous variety of things, whether living or nonliving. These include plants (*GA* I 23 731^a24-26) and animals generally (*NE* X 5 1176^a3-5), including divine celestial ones (*Cael.* II 3 286^a8-11), parts of their bodies and souls (*PA* II 7 652^b6-14, IV 10 686^a26-29), instruments or tools of various sorts (*EE* VII 10 1242^a15-19, *Pol.* I 4 1253^b35), crafts (*as here*), sciences (*EE* II 1 1219^a17), philosophies (*Met.* VII 11 1037^a15), and their practitioners (*NE* VI 7 1141^b10), cities (*Pol.* VII 4 1326^a13-14), and even nature itself (*Pol.* I 10 1258^a35). A thing’s function is intimately related to its end and final cause: “The *function* is the end, and the activity is the *function*” (*Met.* IX 8 1050^a21-22); “each thing that has a function exists for the sake of its function” (*Cael.* II 3 286^a8-9). It is true, too, that the “good—the *well*—seems to lie in the function” (1097^b26-27 below). But this holds only when the thing itself is not already something bad, since “in the case of bad things, the end and the activity must be worse than the capacity” (*Met.* IX 9 1051^a15-16). Finally, a thing’s function is intimately related to its nature, form, and essence. For a thing’s nature is “its end—that is, what it is for the sake of” (*Ph.* II 2 194^a27-28), its form is more its nature than its matter (*Ph.* II 1 193^b6-7), and its essence and form are the same: “by form I mean the essence of each thing” (*Met.* VII 7 1032^b1-2). Hence “all things are defined by their function” (*Met.* IV 12 390^a10), with the result that if something cannot function, it has no more than a name in common with its functional self (*Pol.* I 2 1253^a20-25, *PA* I 1 640^b33-641^a6).

/11/ So are there some functions and actions of a carpenter and of a shoemaker but none at all of a human being? And is he by nature inactive? Or just as of eye, |1097^b30| hand, foot, and of each part generally, there seems to be some function, may we likewise also posit some function of a human being that is beyond all these?⁹

/12/ What, then, could this be? For living is evidently shared with plants as well, but we are looking for what is special.¹⁰ Hence we must set aside the living that

⁹ **Beyond all these:** *PA* I 5 645^b14-20: “Since every instrument is for the sake of something, and each of the parts of the body is for the sake of something, and what they are for the sake of is a certain action, it is evident that the whole body, too, is put together for the sake of a certain complex (*polumerous*) action. For sawing is not for the sake of the saw, but the saw for sawing, since sawing is a certain use. So the body, too, is in a way for the sake of the soul, and the parts of the body for the sake of those functions for which each of them has naturally developed.” *Sens.* 1 436^b10-437^a3: “Each animal, insofar as it is an animal, must possess perception, since it is by this that we distinguish being an animal from not being an animal. As for the various particular senses, taste and touch are necessarily present in all animals, touch because of the explanation we gave in *De Anima* [III 12 434^b13-17: ‘The body of an animal must be capable of touch if the animal is to survive, ... since anything that touches things without sense perception will be unable to avoid some of them and take others. And if that is so, it will be impossible for the animal to survive.’], and taste because of nutrition. For it is by taste that we discern what is pleasant and what is painful where nourishment is concerned, so as to avoid the former and pursue the latter, since flavor as a whole is an affection of the nutritive part. The senses that depend on an external medium, on the other hand, such as smell, hearing, and sight, are found only in animals that can move from place to place. All animals that possess these senses have them for the sake of survival, in order that, guided by antecedent perception, they can pursue their food, and avoid things that are bad or destructive. But in animals that have practical wisdom they are also for the sake of living well, since they inform us of many differences, from which arises practical wisdom about intelligible things (*tôn noêtôn*) and things doable in action.” See also *NE* VI 13 1145^a6-11.

¹⁰ **We are looking for what is special (*idion*):** *Pol.* I 6 1254^b17-19: “People whose function, that is to say, the best thing to come from them, is to use their bodies ... are natural slaves.” *Protr.* B65: “If a human being is a simple animal and his substance is ordered in accord both with reason and with understanding, he has no other function than this alone, namely, the attainment of the most rigorous truth about the beings. But if he is naturally co-composed of several potentialities, and it is clear that he has by nature several functions to be completed, the best of them is always *his* function, as health is the function of the doctor, and safety of a ship’s captain.” Since human beings are not naturally simple (VII 14 1154^b20-22) and do have several functions (I 10 1100^b12-13), the best one will be the one that is special to them. But because human beings have not just a complex but also a compound nature, consisting of a divine element (understanding) and a human one (X 7-8 1177^b26-1178^a23), their special function may—like that of the part of the soul that has reason (VI 1 1139^a17, 2 1139^a29-31,

consists in nutrition and growth. Next in order |1098^a1| is some sort of perceptual living.¹¹ But this, too, is evidently shared with horse and ox and every animal.

/13/ There remains, then, some sort of practical¹² living of what has reason. And of what has reason, one part has it by way of obeying reason, the other¹³ by way of actually having it and exercising thought. But “living” is said of things in two ways, |1098^a5| and we must take the one in accord with activity, since it seems to be called “living” in a fuller sense.¹⁴

/14/ If, then, the function of a human being is activity of the soul in accord with reason or not without reason, and the function of a sort of thing, we say, is the same in kind as the function of an excellent¹⁵ thing of that sort (as in the case of a lyre-player and an excellent lyre-player), and this is unconditionally so in all cases,

^b12)—be compound too. Moreover, it will matter whether we are considering male or female human beings, since these have different special functions (VIII 12 1162^a22-24).

¹¹ **Next in order is some sort of perceptual living:** *NE* is a sort of politics (I 2 1094^b10-11), and so involves some account of the soul (I 13 1102^a18-19). In referring to an “order” among life activities or functions, Aristotle naturally draws on his own account. *PA* II 10, 655^b29-656^a8: “In all living things that are complete there are two parts that are most necessary, the one by which they take in nourishment and the one by which they eliminate residues [= waste products]. For a living thing can neither exist nor grow without nourishment... A third part [= the perceptual part] present in all animals lies between (*meson*) the most necessary ones, and within it is found the starting-point of their sort of life. Since, then, it is the nature of plants [which are also living things] to be immobile, their nonuniform parts are not of many kinds. For the use of a few instrumental parts is enough for the few actions they perform. ... Those beings that have perception in addition to life, by contrast, are more polymorphic in appearance, and of these some more than others, and there is still greater variety among those whose nature partakes not only of living but also of living well. And such is humankind, since of living beings known to us it alone, or it most all, partakes of the divine [= reason and understanding].”

¹² **Practical** (*praktikos*): That is, one consisting in doing actions. See I 5 1095^b22n.

¹³ **One part ... the other:** These parts are discussed in I 13.

¹⁴ **“Life” is said of things in two ways** (*dittôs legomenês*): Things can be said to be “alive” when they have a certain capacity or state or when they are engaged in the correlative activity. See I 8 1098^b30-33.

¹⁵ **Excellent** (*spoudaios*): Often, as here, *spoudaios* is a synonym of *agathos* (“good”) but sometimes, when predicated of things, it means “serious,” “weighty,” or “important,” as at X 6 1177^a1-2.

when we add to the function |1098^a10| the superiority that is in accord with the virtue (for it is characteristic of a lyre-player to play the lyre and of an excellent one to do it well)—if all this is so, and a human being’s function is supposed to be a sort of living, and this living is supposed to be activity of the soul and actions that involve reason, and it is characteristic of an excellent man to do these well and nobly, and /15/ each is completed well when it is in accord with the virtue that properly belongs to it |1098^a15|—if all this is so, the human good turns out to be activity of the soul in accord with virtue and, if there are more virtues than one, the best and most complete.¹⁶ /16/ Furthermore, in a complete life,¹⁷ for one swallow does not make a spring, nor does one day. Nor, similarly, does one day or a short time make someone blessed and happy.¹⁸

¹⁶ **The best and most complete:** An important addendum to this conclusion is added at *Pol.* VII 13 1332^a7-18: “We say, and we have given this definition in our ethical works (if anything in those discussions is of service), that happiness is a complete activation or use of virtue, and not a conditional use but an unconditional one. By “conditional uses” I mean those that are necessary; by “unconditional” I mean those that are noble. For example, in the case of just actions, just retributions and punishments spring from virtue but are necessary uses of it and are noble only in a necessary way, since it would be more choiceworthy if no individual or city needed such things. On the other hand, just actions that aim at honors and prosperity are unconditionally noblest. The former involve choosing something that is somehow bad, whereas the latter are the opposite: they construct and generate goods.” Despite the claim in the opening sentence, nothing quite like this does appear in Aristotle’s ethical works as we have them.

¹⁷ **Complete life** (*bios teleios*): Sometimes a complete life seems to be one that reaches normal life expectancy: “it is correctly said among the majority that a life’s happiness should be judged in its longest time, since what is complete should exist in a complete time and a complete human being” (*MM* I 4 1185^a6-9). This is probably not its meaning in *NE*, however, see for example, IX 8 1169^a18-25.

¹⁸ **Blessed** (*makarios*) **and happy:** *EE* II 1 1219^a35-39: “Since, as we saw, happiness is something complete, and life (*zôê*) can be either complete or incomplete, and virtue the same (for there is the whole and the part), and the activity of incomplete things is incomplete, happiness will be the activity of complete life (*zôês*) in accord with complete virtue.” The next sentence (^a39-40) refers to this as providing “the genus and the defining-mark” of happiness. *Makarios* is often a synonym for “happy,” but sometimes with the implication of being extremely happy (I 10 1001^a7) or in a condition like that of the gods (X 8 1178^b25-32)

[7] /17/ Let the good, then, be outlined |1098^a20| in this way, since perhaps we should sketch first and fill in the details later. It would seem, though, that anyone can develop and articulate the things in the outline that have been correctly done, and that time is a good discoverer and co-worker in such matters. This is even the source of advances in the crafts, since anyone can produce what is lacking.¹⁹ |1098^a25|

/18/ We must also remember what was said before,²⁰ and not look for the same rigor in everything but, in each case, the one that is based on the subject matter and the degree sought by the route of inquiry that properly belongs to it. /19/ For a carpenter and a geometer inquire differently about the right angle. A carpenter does so to the degree that is useful |1098^a30| for his work, whereas a geometer inquires about what it is or what sort of thing,²¹ since he is a contemplator of the truth.²² We must do things in just the same way, then, in other cases, so that side issues do not overwhelm the works themselves.²³

¹⁹ **Anyone can produce what is lacking:** *SE* 34 183^b17-34: “In the case of all discoveries, the results of previous labors, handed down from others, have been advanced bit by bit by those who took them over, whereas the discoveries of starting-points usually constitute small progress at first but were of much greater usefulness than the later ones that developed from them. For the most important thing in all cases is perhaps the starting-point, as the saying goes. That is why it is also the most difficult. ... But when this has been discovered, it is easier to add to it and develop the rest. This is exactly what has happened where accounts of rhetoric as well as practically all the other crafts were concerned. For those who discovered the starting-points carried them forward in an altogether small way, whereas those who are highly reputed nowadays are the heirs, so to speak, of a long succession of predecessors who advanced them bit by bit and so have developed them to their present condition ... Hence it is no wonder that the craft is of some significance.”

²⁰ **What was said before:** At I 3 1094^b11-1095^a2.

²¹ **About what it (*ti esti*) is or what sort of thing (*poion ti*):** Geometry tells us what a right angle is—it specifies its essence—its what it is or what it is to be (*to ti ên einai*) essence. Its essential attributes tell us what sort of thing it is.

²² **Contemplator of the truth (*theatês talêthous*):** Plato, *Rep. V* 475e4 describes philosophers as *tês alêtheias philotheamonas* (“those who love to contemplate truth”).

²³ **The works themselves:** The work of the ethicist or politician is in part (X 9 1179^a33-35) to provide an outline sketch of the good or happiness, which is a starting-point of ethics or politics (I 12 1102^a1-4), that has the degree of rigor appropriate to the relevant subject matter,

/20/ Nor should we demand the cause²⁴ in all cases alike. Rather, in some it will be adequate [1098^b1] if the fact that they are so has been correctly shown²⁵—as it is, indeed, where starting-points are concerned. And *that something is so* is a first thing and a starting-point.²⁶

/21/ We get a theoretical grasp²⁷ of some starting-points through induction,²⁸ some through perception, some through some sort of habituation,²⁹ and others through

which consists of noble and just things. The side issues—literally, the things beyond the works (*parerga*)—are the details that can be readily filled in later once the starting-point has been properly sketched.

²⁴ **Cause** (*aitia*): The distinction between *aitia* (feminine), used here, and *aition* (neuter) is that an *aitia* is sometimes an explanatory argument (a type of deduction) that identifies causes, whereas an *aition* is an item in the world that is causally efficacious. Aristotle does not systematically observe the distinction, but it is *aitia* that figures in his definitions of craft knowledge and scientific knowledge (*APo.* I 2 71^b9-12, II 11 94^a20-27).

²⁵ **Correctly shown** (*deichthênai kalôs*) ... **where starting-points are concerned**: *Deichthênai* is the aorist passive infinitive of the verb *deiknunai*, which means “to show” or “to prove.” One way to show something is to demonstrate it from starting-points or first principles, but a starting-point cannot itself be shown in this way, precisely because it is a first principle (*APo.* I 3 72^b18-33, 22 84^a29-^b1). Nonetheless it can be made evident (*phaneron*) (*APr.* I 30 46^a24-27, *DA* II 2 413^a11-16) or given “an adequate showing” (*dedeigmenon hikanôs*)” (*NE* VII 2 1146^a24-27) through the dialectical or (more accurately) aporematic process of solving the puzzles which, by tying our understanding of it in knots, cloud or darken our perception of it (*Ph.* VIII 3 253^a31-33, *Met.* III 1 955^a27-^b4).

²⁶ **That something is so is ... a starting-point**: Compare I 4 1095^b4-8.

²⁷ **Theoretical grasp** (*theôrein*): The verb *theasthai*, with which *theôria* is cognate, means to look at or gaze at. Hence *theôria* itself is sometimes what one is doing in looking closely at something, or observing, studying, or contemplating it. *Theôria* can thus be an exercise of understanding (*nous*), which is the element responsible for grasping scientific starting-points (VI 6 1141^a7-8), such as (the definition of) right angle in the case of geometry, or (the definition of) happiness in the case of politics. Hence the cognate verb *theôrein* sometime means “to be actively understanding” or “to be actively contemplating” something. In these cases, “get a theoretical grasp on” often seems to convey the right sense.

²⁸ **Induction** (*epagôgê*): “Induction is the route from the particulars to the universal” (*Top.* I 12 105^a13). That is, it is a process that begins with perception of particulars and ends with the grasp of a universal by understanding (*APo.* II 19 99^b35-100^b5).

²⁹ **Habituation** (*ethismos*): A process, typically involving pleasure (reward) and pain (punishment) by which we acquire a habit (*ethos*) that is at once cognitive (as in the case of induction) and conative, because what we experience as pleasurable we tend to desire and

other means. /22/ In each case we should follow the route of inquiry suited to their nature and make very serious efforts [1098^b5] to define them correctly. /23/ For they have a great and decisive influence regarding what follows. It seems, indeed, that the starting-point is more than half the whole and that many of things we were inquiring about will at the same time become evident through it.³⁰

pursue and what we experience as painful we tend to be averse to and avoid (*DA* III 7 431^a8-^b10, *NE* III 5 1114^a31-^b3, III 12 1119^a25-27, *Pol.* VIII 5 1340^a23-28).

³⁰ **Will at the same time become evident through it:** See I 3 1094^b12n.